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PIONEER SERIES No. 16

Captain Allen Gardiner

FIRST ENGLISH MISSIONARY
TO SOUTH AMERICA

Compiled by

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Price Two Cents

"My prayer is that the Lord my God may be glorified in me whether it be by life or death." —*Allen Gardiner*

Woman's Foreign Missionary Society
Methodist Episcopal Church
36 Bromfield Street, Boston, Mass.

Captain Allen Gardiner

MANY times in tracing the footprints of missionary pioneers and discovering how little the men themselves seemed to reap from their self-sacrificing labors, we are tempted to exclaim: "To what purpose is this waste!" Then we remember that the pathmakers of history have always undergone hardships for the sake of those who should come after.

The real leader of God's onward marching host sees ever before him the wide sweep of some "Promised Land," and like Moses on Nebo his soul receives its reward, even though he is "buried in a valley" long before the vision is realized.

This thought comforts us as we study the life before us.

Allen Gardiner was born in England in 1794. Like many another pioneer he gave evidence even in childhood of the spirit which controlled his later life, for when he was found sleeping on the floor one night instead of in his bed, he explained that when he grew to be a man he intended to travel all over the world and wished to get accustomed to hardship! He was trained for the English navy and early in life became an officer. In China he saw idol worship in a heathen temple which served to quicken the Christian impressions of his boyhood and he gave himself to Christ, becoming from that time greatly interested in the religious welfare of the countries he visited.

It was not, however, until the death of his wife, in 1834, that he gave himself wholly to his life purpose, which was "to become the pioneer of a Christian mission to the most abandoned heathen." He married again, and for some time his family shared the experiences that followed.

Captain Gardiner's first decision was to go to South Africa, but the treachery of a Dutch trader and the opposition of Romish priests frustrated the plan. Failure, however, did not discourage him, for his faith always discovered two doors, and when one closed another opened. So, in this dilemma, he turned to the Patagonians in South America, and in 1844 a small mission was formed and he sailed away with one helper.

But then, as now, there were "revolutions" in the "Neglected Continent," and Patagonia was the object of the controversy. In consequence the two Englishmen were obliged to return home the following year.

The next point selected was the Island of Tierra del Fuego. It would seem that here he found his "most abandoned heathen" for, says Darwin, the great naturalist: "These poor wretches were stunted in their growth, their hideous faces were bedaubed with white paint, their skins filthy and greasy, their hair entangled, their voices discordant, their gestures violent." They belonged to the Patagonian race.

During this effort Captain Gardiner had with him four sailors and a ship carpenter, and they attempted to build a house on a small island which he called "Banner Cove." But again they were driven away, and he then went to Germany and to Scotland, laying the case before the churches, but all in vain. Allen Gardiner, however, was not discouraged.

In 1850 he again reached Banner Cove accompanied by six men: Mr. Maidment, a London Sunday school teacher; Richard Williams, a surgeon; Erwin, a ship carpenter, who said that to be with Captain Gardiner was "like a heaven upon earth"; and three Christian Cornish fishermen. The vessel that brought them from England also brought provision for six months and left them, with two or three small boats, on that desolate island, sailing away December 18, with the understanding that at the end of the six months more supplies should be sent.

A few days after they were left at Banner Cove Captain Gardiner wrote from their "Mission Wigwam" to the committee at Brighton: "Nothing can exceed the cheerful endurance of the whole party. I feel that the Lord is with us, and cannot doubt that He will own and bless the work which He has permitted us to begin. . . . When we look on these poor, degraded Indians and consider that they are, like us, destined to live forever, we yearn over them and feel willing to

spend and be spent in the endeavor to bring to their ears in their own tongue the great truths of the gospel of salvation."

But the "degraded Indians" gave only persecution in return, and the following nine months were filled with privation and suffering for the heroic little band. Their boats were their only home and two of those were lost in a terrible storm.

Fearing the worst, Gardiner wrote: "We are gone to Spaniard Harbor. We have sickness on board. Our supplies are nearly out and if not soon relieved we shall be starved."

Several bottles containing this message were buried, and above them they placed a board on which was written, "Look underneath." In addition to this they painted on the rocks, "You will find us in Spaniard Harbor."

They succeeded in reaching there on their last boat, the "Speedwell," finding refuge from terrific storms of wind and snow in deep rock caverns.

No tidings were received from the mission for more than a year, although friends in England had made every effort to send supplies. The statement is made that "no vessel would imperil its insurance for so small a freight!"

At last the ship "Dido" touched at Banner Cove to make inquiries, but all the captain found was the legend on the rock: "*Gone to Spaniard Harbor.*"

A day's sail brought the ship to the harbor, and there on the beach was the mission boat.

As the men of the "Dido" found the dead bodies of the little band they cried like children. All that could now be done was to bury the poor emaciated bodies, which they did,—lowering the colors and firing three volleys as in honor of an officer's funeral. Officers? They were a part of the Great Leader's body-guard!

A journal was found among the scattered papers, from which it appeared that the missionaries died of starvation. They had been driven from place to place by the natives, and cooped up through the long nights of almost perpetual ice and snow, in a small boat whose cabin was so small that the iron deck was only a few inches above their faces. But though death came through such suffering, they did not lose their confidence in God.

Dr. Williams's journal said: "I do love God with a love I had no conception of, with a love that actuates every faculty of my whole soul, and the love of God in Christ I feel beyond expression. . . . Should anything prevent my ever adding to this, let all my beloved ones at home rest assured that I was happy beyond expression, the night I wrote these lines, and would not have changed positions with any man living."

Captain Gardiner wrote on the day of his death: "The Lord has seen fit to call home another of our little company. . . .Yet a little while and we, through grace, may join that blessed throng to sing the praises of Christ throughout eternity. I neither hunger nor thirst, though five days without food. Marvelous loving kindness to me, a sinner."

He also left a message imploring that the mission be sustained, and giving directions which, if followed, he believed would bring success.

As if to leave an enduring testimony the captain of the "Dido" found written upon a rock the verses from Psalm 62: 5-8, beginning, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation."

Had these starved missionaries been in some magnificent English church, well fed and prosperous, upborne by the tuneful praises of a vast congregation, they could not have been more confident. They had answered Paul's question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

The story of Captain Allen Gardiner's "failure" aroused England. In 1854 a schooner, the "Allen Gardiner," was sent out with a sufficient force to establish a mission at Keppel Island in the West Falklands. In 1856 a son of the pioneer joined the force. In 1858 an effort was again made to reach Tierra

del Fuego, and after several years natives trained at Keppel did begin the work of evangelizing these pagans. Within thirty years a Christian community was well established with churches and schools. Darwin was told of the change and frankly acknowledged: "The lesson of the missionary is the enchanter's wand."

From Tierra del Fuego the work spread to the mainland of South America, and still slowly but surely it brings life to what is now called "The Land of Opportunity."

So Captain Allen Gardiner shall some time know that "he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

NOTE: There are slight differences in the accepted accounts of this missionary enterprise, but after careful comparison we have given the most noteworthy facts.